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ABSTRACT

This study explored the efforts of shared decision-making teams (SDM) that were created by a state mandate and charged with improving student achievement in New York state. For example, under the mandate, a shared decision-making team composed of representatives from the administration, the faculty, and parents must be present in each public school building in New York. The teams operate under a set of mutually developed rules with the primary purpose of improving student achievement. In most districts, SDM teams had been in operation for a school year when this survey was conducted. Researchers studied the progress of 108 high school SDM teams (59% of the 183 surveys mailed) through a brief questionnaire that asked for decisions related to the improvement of student performance and methods used to measure the results of any implemented changes. Fifty-three SDM chairpersons (49.1%) reported that their teams had made decisions that had already had an impact on student achievement, and an additional 28.7% (31) indicated that their teams had made decisions that could have an impact on student achievement in the future. The most frequently made decisions were in the area of some type of modification of the instructional program. The next most frequently reported decision was in the area of raising academic standards. About two-thirds of the chairpersons indicated that an evaluation strategy was in place to measure the effects of changes implemented. These evaluations will make it possible to see if SDM results in changes that really improve student achievement. (Contains 15 tables and 16 references.) (SLD)

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ED 405 378

The Efficacy of the Shared Decision-Making Team as a Means for Improving Student Achievement

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Introduction

Across the nation, several large scale statewide reform initiatives have included policies which established shared decision-making (SDM) teams as part of a larger plan to restructure educational institutions. For example, in New York State each building's SDM team was charged, under Commissioner's Regulation 100.11, with the task of improving the educational performance of all students in the school.

> The purpose of school-based planning and shared decision-making is to improve the educational performance of all students in the school, regardless of such factors as socioeconomic status, race, sex, language background, or disability. (Regional School Services Team [RSST] , 1996, p.1).

In an attempt to assess the progress of schools in implementing this reform goal, a study was conducted by the NYS Education Department during the 1995-96 school year (RSST, 1996). Although general questions were asked about the linkage between the actions of the SDM teams and the improvement of student achievement, detailed information was not gathered about the methods that districts were utilizing to accomplish this task nor were data collected about the methods districts were using to measure improvement in student achievement. The study reported here attempted to address this information gap. The researchers studied the progress of 108 high school SDM teams from across New York State as they worked to meet the intent of this key dimension of the statewide reform initiative known as the *New Compact for Learning*. From anecdotal field data and a review of the literature, the researchers hypothesized that there would be considerable variation in the schools' success in implementing the shared decision-making regulations particularly as their efforts related to the improvement of student achievement. The researchers also hypothesized that the teams would focus most of their energy on correcting perceived health and safety concerns or on addressing mundane, administrative tasks in spite of the regulation's focus on improving student achievement.

Rationale and Review of Literature

Theoretical Basis for the Use of Shared Decision-Making

Many educational reformers have rallied in support of a decentralized approach to managing and decision-making. Though approaches like School-Based Management (SBM) serve to center attention at the school site, Shared Decision-Making (SDM) extends beyond this mere site-focus by providing a formal system through which various stakeholder groups can participate in the process of making decisions. These groups may include administrators, teachers, parents, students, non-instructional staff members, board of education members, and community members.

A multitude of schools across the country have implemented some form of SBM and/or SDM. Schools in several major cities like Chicago, Seattle, Philadelphia, and Memphis, as well as forty-four states, according to Herman and Herman (1993) have implemented such reform efforts and the list is growing. SDM seems to be replacing SBM as the preferred vehicle for educational reformers. So much emphasis is placed on the value of using SDM team strategies in schools, it is almost seen as a panacea for the various ills of education. As Weiss noted, "...the justificatory baggage is so eclectic that shared-decision making (SDM) begins to seem like an all-purpose solution to a host of different and unrelated problems," (1993, p. 69).

There are several premises underlying the support for the use of SDM. Taking a shared approach to decision making, some suggest, is more fair and democratic than mere decentralization (Conley and Bacharach, 1990). It not only incorporates a wide range of stakeholder groups in the decision-making process, but it also brings about more innovative alternatives to solving problems, and, thus, makes for better decisions (Liontos, 1994).

Of the various stakeholder groups, teachers and parents have surfaced as primary players. For teachers, one theory goes, participation in school decision-making will elevate their morale and overall job satisfaction (Black, 1996; Liontos, 1994: Weiss, 1993). Becoming involved in a shared approach to decision-making will serve to underscore the

professional nature of the position of teaching, while giving teachers an opportunity to voice their opinions about their own working conditions (Weiss, 1993). Participating in the decision-making process allows them to shape the proposed idea into a form that fits with the culture and context of the school, take possession of the idea as their own, and become committed to the idea to ensure implementation (Weiss and Cambone, 1994). Parents also play an important role in the SDM process. As 'consumers', involvement in SDM gives them the opportunity to have a direct say about the policies that affect the quality of their children's schooling (Liontos, 1994).

The most persuasive argument in favor of shared decision-making is the underlying assumption that "the primary control of pedagogical knowledge should be left to teachers," (Conley & Bacharach, 1990, p. 541), since it is through them, proponents of SDM believe, that school effectiveness and student achievement will improve (Black, 1996; Conley & Bacharach, 1990; Lange, 1993; Liontos, 1994; Miller, 1995; Weiss, 1993; Weiss & Cambone, 1994). Weiss (1993) notes educators' belief that teachers' familiarity with student issues should steer the decision-making process away from an administrative, bureaucratic focus toward issues related to curriculum and student achievement. Their status as experts when dealing with issues of teaching and learning will also serve to do this. Finally, it is argued that the SDM teams will "unleash teacher creativity," (Weiss, 1993, p. 70).

These final justifications for shared decision-making rely on the assumption that shared decision-making teams are given the opportunity to address issues that might have an impact on schooling and student achievement. Areas like the development of curricula, programs, and courses, making changes in student scheduling, and examining approaches to teaching, learning, and assessment might fall into this category (Weiss, 1993). Schools with teams that do address such issues should show signs of improvement with regard to student performance. A review of the literature indicates that few studies have been conducted to determine the extent to which SDM teams address issues which affect student performance and the extent to which those teams attempt to measure their impact. Little evidence, thus far, has been produced to support the notion that SDM has had a positive impact on student performance, leading some educators to assume that SDM may

be a process that is merely "...cloaked in the language of increasing student achievement," (David, 1995-96, p. 5).

An Overview of Actual Issues Addressed by SDM Teams

Weiss (1993), in her study of the issues shared decision-making teams address, examined twelve schools, six with SDM teams, and six without. In the latter cases, principals made most decisions. The researcher found that SDM teams do not focus on issues that could, potentially, impact student achievement. Rather, team members in SDM schools, unlike administrators in traditional schools, often spent too much time on getting the process going. Though teams did devote some time to curriculum-oriented issues, like revision of courses, implementation of new programs, and schedule changes, so did administrators in non-SDM schools. Although David (1995-96) found that SDM teams often focus on managerial issues, like discipline, Weiss (1993) concluded otherwise.

Kannepel (1994), who analyzed seven of ten schools implementing Site-Based Decision-Making as a response to Kentucky's Education Reform Act, found teams tended to focus on areas of budget, scheduling, hiring of personnel, and curriculum, to a lesser extent. In contrast to the findings of Weiss, these teams addressed discipline issues quite frequently. Conley and Bacharach (1990) found that teachers have the desire to address issues of "strategic/operational interface," but have little opportunity to do so (1990, p. 543). How students are assigned to class, how teachers are assigned to classes, and how students are disciplined and promoted are some examples.

Research conducted by New York State's Education Department (RSST, 1996) reveals a slightly different picture. Here, an attempt to look at the impact of SDM on student achievement from the individual building level was made. Six hundred and sixty-six team members, including principals, teachers, support staff, parents, community members, and students responded to the survey.

Team members were given lists of issues from several broad categories: curriculum and instruction; use of time and human resources; communication and student/family support; school finances; and physical environment. For each issue, members were asked if the team explored/studied the issue, if decisions were made about it, if those decisions

were implemented, and if the team had evaluated the effect of the decisions on student achievement.

Issues of curriculum and instruction received the highest percentage of study/exploration, though student discipline was one issue included in this general category. Most of the respondents, 92.4%, reported having studied curriculum and instruction issues. Only 80.5 % made decisions related to this issue area, 69.5 % implemented the decision, and 34.6% evaluated the impact of the decisions. Other categories of issues were explored/studied in the following order, from most to least: use of time and human resources, student/family support, school finance, and physical environment. Only a small percentage of teams who addressed issue areas attempted to evaluate the impact of their decision. The greatest percentage for any specific issue was the 13.9% response rate for those who evaluated decisions regarding the issue of student discipline. No attempt was made to examine the means that teams used to measure or evaluate decisions to determine if those means were congruent with the issue addressed or with student achievement.

The New York State survey does suggest that SDM teams are addressing issues concerned with curriculum and instruction, the category most likely to impact student achievement. However, discipline, an issue which may not impact student achievement directly, was the issue most frequently cited as being addressed by SDM teams. Other research, furthermore, does not suggest that SDM teams address those issues that more directly impact student achievement to any great extent above and beyond schools without SDM teams. It is important to consider the reasons why SDM teams fail to operate as they are intended.

SDM teams have encountered some stumbling blocks in implementing the cooperative decision-making process. Weiss and Cambone (1994) maintain that the SDM process itself consumes a great amount of teachers' time. This, in turn, serves to redirect their attention away from the classroom. The time factor "... may pose the greatest barrier to implementing and maintaining SDM," (Liontos, 1994, p.2). Weiss (1993) even suggests that SDM may have been designed specifically to keep teachers busy on committees so that they do not challenge those in authority. Team members, almost invariably, assume a

heavier work load as a result of participating in this process. Involving multiple players in the decision-making process slows the team's ability to act swiftly and decisively.

Many team members, especially teachers, have expressed frustration that the SDM process gives "merely a semblance of authority while real authority remains securely anchored in the principal's office or the district headquarters," (Weiss, 1993, p.70). A related concern is that SDM teams are not granted legitimate authority to actually make decisions, and, at times, decisions are made solely or exclusively by administrators, despite their having delegated decision-making authority to the team. Teachers have also expressed concern that the principal is the only one with the "big picture" and therefore it is more legitimate for him/her to make the difficult decisions.

Despite the pitfalls in the SDM process, team members continue to collaborate to address various important issues. Since the fundamental argument in favor of this reform effort is that it should serve to improve student performance, it is imperative that researchers begin to measure the extent to which this occurs.

The Impact of SDM Teams on Student Achievement

Of the studies conducted on shared decision-making and its impact on student performance, very few have attempted to evaluate quantitative data. Even fewer studies report a positive link between improved student performance and the shared decision-making process (Summer & Johnson, 1995).

Taylor and Bogotch (1994) examined two groups of schools, 18 with a process for SDM, and 20 without. One thousand six hundred fifty four teachers from these schools responded to the questionnaire. In attempting to determine the effects of SDM, the researchers looked at "the possibility that teachers participation might positively affect student achievement," (Taylor & Bogotch, 1994, p. 305). Using math scores from the Stanford Achievement Test, gain/loss scores were calculated. This was done by subtracting the score for the school year before implementation of SDM from data from the third year of implementation. The researchers found no correlation between involvement of teachers in decision-making and individual student performance.

Thomas (1995) looked at teachers' perceptions concerning the impact of SDM on student achievement. Thirty teachers surveyed in Chicago schools indicated that students were not improving in areas of reading or mathematics. Another researcher, Weiss (1993), looked at a total of twelve schools, six with SDM teams and six without. In conducting extensive interviews of various school administrators, teachers, and other staff members, she determined that there is "... little support for the contention that SDM is justified by its disposition for turning schools' focus to teaching, learning, and student issues," (Weiss, 1993, p.78). In actuality, schools with and without SDM devoted almost an equal amount of emphasis on issues that might impact student achievement. "The theory that shared decision-making leads to improved student performance remains unproved," (Miller, 1995, p. 2).

Another study, conducted by Ramey and Dornseif (1994) in Seattle's Schools for the 21st Century, examined responses from teachers in 19 SBM schools in 1992, and teachers in 13 SBM schools in 1993, to a questionnaire aimed at calculating a score to indicate the extent of teacher participation in decision-making. An overall achievement gain score was then computed using California Achievement Test results. Though the authors reported a curvilinear relationship between SDM participation and student achievement, achievement was found to correlate "only moderately with SDM mean scores," (Ramey & Dornseif, 1994, p.3).

There is little solid evidence in the research literature to support the notion that the use of a participatory decision-making process leads to increased student performance. It may be, however, that for most schools the SDM approach is still only in its beginning stages. Attempts to gather and analyze quantitative data on student performance may, at this early phase, yield little in terms of concrete evidence. Still, if SDM teams are addressing issues that might potentially impact the area of student achievement it is not clear that schools with SDM teams have done so consistently, or that they have attempted to implement an appropriate measure of the impact their decisions have had on student achievement.

Purpose of the Study

To what extent does the current educational reform movement involving shared decision-making and site-based management actually focus on the improvement of student achievement? What types of evaluation processes are being used to measure the anticipated impact on student achievement? While team members report limited efforts to address the improvement of student achievement, are these measurement efforts methodologically sound? These general questions continue to swirl around the shared decision-making controversy. Most practitioners agree that the shared decision-making process takes more time and sometimes is more difficult than conventional decision-making strategies. As a consequence of the time and energy intensive nature of the shared decision-making process, it is important that its application yield significant results.

This study sought to investigate, in an exploratory manner, the efforts of shared decision-making teams which were created by state mandate and charged with the primary purpose of improving student achievement. Under Commissioner's Regulation 100.11, each public school building in New York State must operate a shared decision-making team. These teams must be composed of representatives from administration, the teaching faculty and parents. The teams operate under a set of mutually developed rules with the primary purpose of improving student achievement. In most districts, the SDM teams had been in operation for one school year when this survey was conducted. Some teams were in their second year of operation. As researchers actively involved with practitioners on other projects, this research team had the opportunity to talk informally with all stakeholder groups about their perceptions of the shared decision-making process. From school building to school building there appeared to be significant variation in the success these teams were experiencing in meeting the student achievement improvement mandate. In general, elementary school teams seemed less concerned than did teams from the secondary schools. Therefore, the researchers targeted the state's secondary schools for a study which would ask shared decision-making team chairpersons to comment on their team's progress with respect to decisions which had impacted student achievement. Since many of the teams had only been operating for one school year, it was decided that the chairpersons should also be asked whether the SDM teams had made any decisions which

could impact student achievement in the future. Certainly it would be unreasonable to expect that a SDM team could form, determine a specific objective, develop an action plan, implement the plan and still expect to measure changes in student academic performance within the scope of one school year. It would be reasonable to expect, however, that the teams could set student achievement improvement goals and identify the means by which these goals would be measured. This match between student achievement improvement goals and the corresponding assessments was a primary focus of this research effort.

Methodology

The study employed a short questionnaire which was sent to the SDM chairpersons from 108 high school buildings from New York State. They were asked to identify decisions related to the improvement of student academic performance and the methods used to measure the results of any implemented changes.

Research Population and Sample Selection Procedures

Two hundred and fifty New York State public senior high schools were initially selected through a systematic random process from a total pool of over 579 schools. Only schools housing grades 9-12 and 10-12 were included in the sample. The schools represented small and large cities, suburban and rural environments. Although the researchers initially included the senior high schools located in New York City, the response rate from this group of schools was unacceptably low and, as a result, they were excluded from the analysis. The resulting population, excluding New York City, was 512 schools. This decision in turn reduced the sample size to 183 schools. A fifteen item questionnaire was mailed to the chair of the SDM team for each of the 183 schools in the sample. Since the initial response rate was not acceptable to the researchers, a second mailing was undertaken. A total of 108 surveys from the 183 mailed were returned for a response rate of 59%.

Survey Questionnaire

The first questions on the survey solicited descriptive information about the respondents (gender, age, stakeholder group represented) and the composition of the shared decision-making team. The instrument also contained several questions about the SDM teams efforts to improve student achievement. SDM chairpersons were asked to describe decisions made by their teams which had already impacted student achievement as well as those decisions which could impact student achievement in the future. Respondents were also questioned about the methods being used to measure any changes in student achievement. For SDM teams reporting no progress in improving student achievement, the chairpersons were asked to describe any impediments they encountered while trying to meet their goal. All questions in the survey were designed in an open-ended format to encourage richer and more detailed responses. The researchers hypothesized that decisions designed to improve student achievement could be classified as a change in one of the following areas: curriculum, instructional methodology, assessment, use of instructional time, student grouping patterns, academic standards, graduation requirements or grading practices. In addition, the researchers hypothesized that decisions not directly related to the improvement of student achievement but which might be the subject of shared decision-making could be classified into the following categories: climate, health and safety, daily management, personnel, union, recognition, parental and community involvement, budget, discipline, facilities, fund raising or extra-curricular.

Analysis of the Results

The data were analyzed in several ways. First, the respondents were described with respect to their gender, age and stakeholder group affiliation. Then the composition of the SDM teams was presented. Finally, the responses to the survey questions were analyzed first for all respondents and then by comparing the teams reporting progress on addressing student achievement with those teams reporting no progress in this area.

Description of the Respondents

Since the actions of the surveyed SDM teams were reported by the chairperson, it is crucial that the characteristics of the responding chairpersons be described so that the reader can judge the potential bias in the responses. The respondents were predominantly male (68.5%) with an average age of nearly 49 years. The female respondents' mean age was 45 years which was significantly different from that of the males ($F = 6.91$, $p < .01$). For details see Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

Gender of Responding SDM Team Chairpersons

Gender	Male	Female	Missing	Total
Number	74	32	2	108
Percentage	68.5	29.6	1.9	100

Table 2

Age of Responding SDM Team Chairpersons

All	Male	Female
Mean age = 47.66 years	Mean = 48.8 years	Mean = 45.0 years
Standard Deviation = 6.89	S.D. = 6.4	S.D. = 7.3
Range 18 - 77	28 - 77	18 - 55

One hundred of the responding SDM chairpersons were school employees which was 92.6 % of the total. Most were administrators (51.9%), forty-one (38%) were teachers, and just 2.8% were non-instructional staff members. Only 5.5% of the responding chairpersons represented all other stakeholder groups; parents (2.8%), student (0.9%), board members (0.9%) and community members (0.9%). Clearly this disproportionate representation of

school employees in the role of chairperson must be recognized (Table 3).

Table 3

Stakeholder Group Representation of SDM Team Chairpersons

Group	Number	Percentage
School Employees	*100*	*92.6*
Administrators	56	51.9
Teachers	41	38
Staff Members	3	2.8
All Other Groups	*6*	*5.5*
Parents	3	2.8
Board	1	0.9
Students	1	0.9
Community	1	0.9
Missing	*2*	*1.9*

Description of the SDM Teams

The SDM chairpersons were asked to indicate the number of members from each stakeholder group serving on the team. Those results are summarized in Table 4. The 'typical' team can be described as being composed of 1 administrator, 4 teachers, 2 parents, 2 students and 1 non-instructional staff member. Therefore, if the representation of chairpersons from each stakeholder group was proportional to this 'typical' team, one

could expect 10% administrators, 40% teachers, 20% parents, 20% students and 10% non-instructional staff members. When compared with the actual representation shown in Table 3, the only group proportionately represented in the role of chairperson is teachers. Administrators are overrepresented while parents, students, board members and non-instructional staff members are underrepresented.

Table 4

SDM Team Composition by Stakeholder Group

Group	Mean (SD)	Mode	Range
Administrators	1.70 (1.10)	1	1-9
Board of Education	0.14 (0.40)	0	0-2
College Representatives	0.01 (0.10)	0	0-1
Community Members	1.11 (1.40)	0	0-5
Parents	2.79 (1.59)	2	0-8
Staff Members	1.45 (1.36)	1	0-7
Students	2.38 (1.16)	2	0-6
Teachers	4.73 (2.97)	4	0-22

Analysis of Results for all Respondents

Fifty-three (49.1%) SDM chairpersons reported that their teams had made decisions which already had an impact on student achievement. Another 31 (28.7%) chairpersons indicated that their teams had made decisions which *could impact* student achievement *in the future*. Therefore 84 (77.8%) respondents indicated that they had in some manner made decisions that were in their judgment related to the improvement of student achievement. Whereas 24 chairpersons or 22.2% of the total respondents reported

no decisions related to the improvement of student achievement at all. However, when the responses were analyzed, only 46 (42.6%) actually reported decisions which had already impacted student achievement, 37 (34.3%) reported decisions which could impact student achievement in the future, and 25 (23.1%) reported no decisions related to student achievement. The chairpersons were then asked to elaborate on the types of decisions they felt were related to student achievement or the reasons for not dealing with this mandated goal.

Decisions which have impacted student achievement

Respondents were asked 'Has the team made any decision which has **already impacted** student achievement? and, if so, 'What decision was made?'. Results were tallied by frequency of response and are shown below in Table 5. The most frequently reported decision dealt with some type of modification of the instructional program. This category of response was mentioned nearly twice as often as the next closest category. The next most frequently reported category was raising academic standards, followed by modifications in student assessment strategies and changes in student discipline practices. The remaining categories were much less frequently mentioned by the chairpersons.

Decisions which may impact student achievement in the future

When asked if their SDM teams had made any decisions which could impact student achievement in the future, the chairpersons reported actions which fell into a similar set of categories (Table 6). Once again the focus of the SDM teams was on the instructional program and academic standards. This question was deemed important by the researchers because of the timing of the survey. Many teams had only been fully operational for one year and, as a result, it was reasonable to expect that they would not have had the time to observe results for decisions which had not yet been implemented fully.

Table 5

Shared Decision-Making Areas Identified by Chairpersons as Related to Student Achievement (Highest Frequency Response Listed First)

* *Modified the Instructional Program - 40*
  - Added courses
  - Adopted alternative instructional schedules
  - Established alternative programs
  - Modified curricula
  - Restructured student grouping and placement
  - Created peer support and tutoring groups
  - Expanded computer/technology offerings and facilities
  - Revised summer school policies
  - Improved library services
  - Reduced class sizes
  - Integrated academic areas
  - Created a homework policy
  - Funded college waivers for courses taken in high school
* *Raised academic standards - 23*
  - Increased graduation requirements
  - Established or increased honor roll criteria
  - Increased passing score
  - Required more or all students to take Regents courses
  - Established an academic eligibility policy
  - Revised the class ranking process
  - Adopted a mission statement
* *Modified student assessment procedures - 13*
  - Revised testing schedules
  - Changed grading policies
  - Sought variances for Regents Examinations
  - Changed assessment methods
  - Established exemptions from final examinations
* *Modified student discipline practices and policies - 12*
  - Revised or created student handbook
  - Revised or created student attendance policy
  - Revised or created student smoking policy
  - Revised student discipline policy
* *Established or expanded student recognition efforts - 6*
  - Created scholastic awards program
  - Established scholastic incentive program
* *Took other actions - 5*
  - Worked to increase parental involvement
  - Created staff development opportunities
  - Utilized interview teams to hire new faculty

Table 6
Shared Decision-Making Areas Identified by Chairpersons with the Potential to Impact Student Achievement in the Future
(Highest Frequency Response Listed First)

* *Modified the Instructional Program - 57*
- Adopted alternative instructional schedules
- Added courses
- Created peer support and tutoring groups
- Modified curricula
- Restructured student grouping and placement
- Established alternative programs
- Expanded computer/technology offerings and facilities
- Reduced class sizes
- Integrated academic areas
- Revised summer school policies

* *Raised academic standards - 25*
- Increased graduation requirements
- Established an academic eligibility policy
- Increased passing score
- Required more or all students to take Regents courses
- Adopted a mission statement
- Revised the class ranking process

* *Modified student discipline practices and policies - 10*
- Revised or created student attendance policy
- Revised student discipline policy
- Revised or created student handbook

* *Modified student assessment procedures - 8*
- Changed assessment methods
- Revised testing schedules
- Changed grading policies

* *Established or expanded student recognition efforts - 5*
- Created scholastic awards program

* *Took other actions - 4*
- Created staff development opportunities
- Worked to increase parental involvement

SDM team plans for measuring the improvement of student achievement

In order to assess the effect of SDM team decisions on student performance, measurement strategies related to academic achievement must be utilized. In most instances where a chairperson reported a measurement strategy, student grades were identified as the variable which would be examined (Table 7). This variable provides a direct measure of student academic achievement, whereas some of the other variables, like AP course enrollment rates, are more indirectly related to student academic performance. Clearly for the variable dealing with levels of student participation in school activities, there is not even an indirect relationship to student achievement.

Table 7

Variables Used to Measure Changes in Student Achievement

(Highest Frequency Response Listed First)

Student grades - 80

Teacher observations - 24

Student attendance - 19

Number of discipline referrals/suspensions - 11

Number of students on honor roll - 7

Student drop-out rate - 9

College admission rate - 5

AP course enrollment rate - 5

Performance based assessment results - 3

Post high school employment rates - 2

Participation in school activities - 1

Number participating in internships - 1

Measurement strategies used to assess progress

To what degree did the measurement strategies reported by the SDM chairpersons match the actions taken by the SDM teams to improve student achievement? Did the SDM teams use multiple measures to judge the effects of their decisions? Did the assessment strategies directly or indirectly measure student achievement?

In Table 8, the 46 plans for measuring the impact of SDM team decisions were categorized based upon the number of variables to be assessed. Two-thirds of these evaluation plans relied on one or more variables while one third did not identify any variable to be monitored. When the variables to be measured were compared with the actions taken, all 31 exhibited at least some level of congruence (Table 9). In most cases, the match was quite good. For example, changes in the instructional program were most often to be evaluated by examining changes in student grades. Even in areas more indirectly related to student achievement, like discipline, the effectiveness of changes in building discipline policies were to be assessed by compiling data on the number of discipline referrals and student suspension rates.

Table 8

Number of Variables to be Analyzed

	None	One	Multiple
Number	15	15	16
% of All Respondents	13.9	13.9	14.8
% of Those Reporting Decisions Related to Student Achievement	32.6	32.6	34.8

Table 9

Congruence Between Decisions and Variables Used to Measure Impact

	No Strategy	Some Level of Congruence
Number	15	31
% of All Respondents	13.9	28.7
% of Those Reporting Decisions Related to Student Achievement	32.6	67.4

The relationships between the measurement variables and student achievement were examined to determine whether the SDM teams would actually be able to assess the impact of their decisions on student achievement. If the variables were not directly related to the stated goal of improved student achievement, then the ability of the SDM teams to draw conclusions about their own success would be severely limited. For the purposes of this research, a direct relationship with student achievement was defined as one which employed a student academic performance variable. An indirect relationship was one which assessed a variable linked to a student academic performance variable. For example, student grades are a direct measure of student achievement, whereas, the number of students on the honor roll is a variable which is indirectly related to student achievement. Of the 46 chairpersons reporting decisions impacting student achievement, 20 (43.5%) used a variable which was a direct measure of student performance, 8 (17.4%) used a

variable with an indirect connection to student achievement, and 18 (39.1%) did not measure student academic performance (Table 10).

Table 10

Relationship Between Measurement Strategy and Student Achievement

	None	Indirect	Direct
Number	18	8	20
% of All Respondents	16.7	7.4	18.5
% of Those Reporting Decisions Related to Student Achievement	39.1	17.4	43.5

Reasons for not addressing student achievement

When asked why their SDM teams did not focus on the mandated goal of improving student achievement, the chairpersons gave a variety of responses (Table 11). Some reasons were related to the nature of the SDM process itself. They indicated that consensus decision-making takes a long time, that team members had difficulty reaching consensus, and that in some cases team members were not committed to the process. The chairpersons also cited outside influences which caused problems. Some SDM team members felt that they did not have the authority to make decisions, that their charge and responsibilities were not made clear by the administration, and that teacher union actions caused delays.

Table 11

Reasons Given by SDM Chairpersons for Not Addressing Student Achievement (Highest Frequency Response Listed First)

* Focused on issues unrelated to student achievement - 13
* SDM is a long and difficult process - 7
* SDM team has no authority to make decisions - 6
* SDM team is just getting started - 4
* SDM team goals/responsibilities are unclear - 3
* Difficulty in reaching consensus - 3
* Student achievement is outside SDM team area of responsibility - 2
* Union actions caused delays - 2
* Lack of member commitment to process - 2
* Group still forming - 2
* Difficulty with communication - 2
* Focus on discipline - 1
* Unable to measure results - 1
* Large turnover in administration - 1
* SDM team is too large -1

If the SDM team did not address student achievement, what decisions were made?

Those chairpersons which reported that their SDM teams had not yet addressed student achievement were asked to identify the areas in which they had made decisions. Their decision areas were primarily management or organizational (Table 12). It is interesting to note, however, that some decision areas reported as being unrelated to the improvement of student achievement by this group were the same decision areas reported by other SDM chairpersons as being related to student achievement. This confusion over

how to address the improvement of student achievement was also reflected in the anecdotal comments found on some of the survey instruments.

Table 12

Issues Addressed in the SDM Process Instead of Student Achievement

(Highest Frequency Response Listed First)

* Improve facilities/environment/technology - 7
* Restructure schedule - 4
* Create student recognition programs - 4
* Sponsor speakers or special programs - 4
* Improved communications - 4
* Daily operational procedures - 4
* Discipline policy - 3
* Procedural issue for meeting - 2
* Changes in student grouping - 2
* Attendance policy - 2
* Agreement on goals - 2
* Interviewing/hiring policy - 2
* Others - 20 diverse individual responses

Analysis of Results by Subgroups

The data were further analyzed by considering the gender and stakeholder group membership of the respondents. Did it make a difference if the reporting chairperson was a man or woman? administrator, teacher or other stakeholder? The researchers also examined the number of team members representing each group to determine if the

composition of the SDM team was related to the team's decision to focus on the improvement of student achievement?

Characteristics of the Respondents

Table 13 shows the cross tabulation of chairperson gender and whether the SDM team focused on the improvement of student achievement. While female chairpersons were more likely to report that their SDM teams made decisions related to the improvement of student achievement than their male counterparts, the chi square results were not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 2.15$, $p = 0.14$).

Table 13

Cross Tabulation: Gender of Responding SDM Chairpersons By Decisions Related to Student Achievement

Gender	Made Decisions	Did not Make Decisions	Total
Male	32(50.8%)	31(49.2%)	63(71.6%)
Female	17(68%)	8(32%)	25(28.4%)
Total	49(55.7%)	39(44.3%)	88(100%)

When the group affiliation of the responding chairpersons was examined by whether the group focused on the improvement of student achievement or some other issue, Table 14 illustrates that administrators, serving as chairpersons, were more likely

than chairpersons representing any other stakeholder group to report that their teams had addressed the improvement of student achievement. Whether this means that SDM teams led by administrators were more likely to address issues related to student performance or that administrators were more likely to judge the team's efforts more favorably in this respect can not be determined. The differences among the stakeholder groups were not statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 5.76$, $p = 0.45$).

Table 14

Cross Tabulation: Stakeholder Group Membership by Decisions Related to Student Achievement

Group	Made Decisions	Did Not Make Decisions	Total
Administrators	28 (63.6%)	16 (36.4%)	44 (50.6%)
Community Members	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.1%)
Parents	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)	3 (3.4%)
Staff Members	1 (33.3%)	2 (66.7%)	3 (3.4%)
Students	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.1%)
Teachers	16 (47.1%)	18 (52.9%)	34 (39.1%)
Board Members	1 (100%)	0 (0%)	1 (1.1%)

Characteristics of the SDM Teams

The last question addressed dealt with the potential impact of SDM team composition on the nature of the decisions made by the team. The mean numbers in each stakeholder group for decision and non-decision teams were compared using Analysis of Variance and no significant differences were found. Therefore there were no significant differences in the number of members representing each stakeholder group for teams focusing on the improvement of student achievement and those teams which did not. The F ratios are shown in Table 15.

Table 15

ANOVA Results Comparing Teams Which Addressed Student Achievement with Those That Did Not

Stakeholder Group	F Ratio	F Probability
Administrators	2.01	0.16
Board Members	3.59	0.06
Community Members	1.30	0.26
College Representatives	0.78	0.38
Parents	0.52	0.47
Staff Members	0.28	0.60
Students	1.12	0.29
Teachers	0.07	0.79

Discussion and Implications

This investigation sought to shed light on the efficacy of the shared decision-making process when SDM teams are mandated to focus on the improvement of student achievement. Are secondary school SDM teams across New York State addressing the mandated goal? How far along the implementation timeline are these teams? How are they attempting to improve student achievement? What methods are the SDM teams using to assess their progress? Why is the SDM process sometimes derailed? Finally, is SDM team composition related to its focus?

Demographics of the Respondents and the Composition of their SDM Teams

The data show that school personnel, including administrators, teachers and other staff members, serve in the leadership role for most secondary school SDM teams. Indeed, only 5.5% of the chairperson positions were held by non-school employees. Most chairpersons were administrators (51.9%) followed by teachers (38%). While the intent of Commissioner's Regulation 100.11 may have been to create a decision-making forum which included the voices of many stakeholders, the leadership of the SDM teams remains firmly within the traditional leadership structure of the organization. The teams are also led most frequently by males (68.5%) which reflects the historical gender pattern found in leadership. When compared with the percentage of membership for each stakeholder group, these patterns of leadership representation are disproportionate in favor of males, administrators and school employees. The reader of this research report should consider the demographics of the responding sample of chairpersons when interpreting their answers to the questions posed. The researchers also examined the composition of the SDM teams and found no obvious relationships with the decisions being made by these teams.

Did the SDM Teams Focus on the Improvement of Student Achievement?

Since implementation of any educational change takes time, the chairpersons were asked to indicate whether their teams had already made decisions with an impact on student performance and whether they had made decisions which could impact on student

achievement at some point in the future. Less than half of the SDM chairpersons (42.6%) indicated that their teams had made decisions which already had an impact on student achievement and roughly one third reported that their teams (34.3%) had made decisions which could impact student achievement in the future. It should be noted, however, that even with a state mandate requiring the teams to focus on the improvement of student performance, nearly one-quarter (23.1%) of the chairpersons reported that this was not happening for a variety of reasons. In order to improve student academic performance most teams sought to modify the instructional program and/or establish academic standards. The teams were restructuring existing programs and/or implementing educational innovations to address their improvement goals. For the teams not addressing student performance, the most common reasons dealt with the difficult nature of the shared decision-making process itself, a finding which confirms earlier research. It was also interesting to note that SDM team members have different opinions about the issues that impact student achievement. Issues like scheduling, student grouping, and attendance were listed by various respondents as being potentially able to impact student achievement, or as having no impact on student achievement.

Overall, however, these findings bode well for proponents of SDM who have argued that teams should be addressing instruction-oriented issues. Most teams are attempting to target the improvement of student achievement although they are at different points along the implementation timeline.

SDM Team Efforts to Evaluate Results

An important phase of any change process is the evaluation of outcomes. In order to determine the impact of any restructuring effort or innovation on the improvement of student academic performance, methodologically sound evaluation strategies must be in place. In this study, about two thirds of the chairpersons who reported some focus on the improvement of student achievement indicated that they had a measurement strategy in place to assess the outcomes. Most of the reported evaluation strategies (43.5%) were directly related to student achievement, with another 17.4% judged to be indirectly related

to student performance. Unfortunately, the other 39.1% of the chairpersons reported that their SDM teams either had no evaluation strategy (32.6%) or a strategy totally unrelated to student achievement (6.5%). Virtually all evaluation strategies were congruent with the improvement goals expressed by the respondents, therefore, the teams were positioned to effectively measure expected outcomes. A very small percentage of the chairpersons reported the actual results of these evaluation procedures so it is not possible to comment on the degree to which the SDM teams were successful in the improvement of student academic performance.

Conclusions

For the mandated goals of SDM to be fully realized, it is imperative that SDM teams focus on issues related to student achievement, remain committed to implementing these goals, develop adequate strategies for measuring the impact on student achievement, and actually implement their evaluation plans. Further study is needed to determine if teams have been successful in improving student performance. In addition, given the drawbacks of SDM, should it be determined that SDM does not serve to improve student achievement, educational policy makers must decide if contributing time, effort and other resources toward the SDM process is worth the results.

For the administrator, the answer to this question is critical, for her/his role may be significantly transformed by the continued expansion of the SDM process. Increases in time committed to the process, changes in the nature of expected leadership styles, and questions of accountability, can all impact the administrator's commitment to the SDM process and its resulting efficacy for improving student performance.

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